

House Republican Press Release

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It's "On The Web"



By State Representative John J. Ryan

This year's General Assembly Session has now been underway for several weeks. Committees are meeting to 'raise' bills (meaning take them up for consideration) are scheduling public hearings, and have to decide how to act on bills that are heard in committee before the committee's "Joint Favorable (JF) deadlines" to move a bill out to the floor of the House or Senate. And while this is a "short session year", there are a large number of bills that committees are raising, but more on that in a future column.

How do you, the interested voter { well, at least you are reading this column!) do a better job of following what is going on in your State Legislature? Two examples prominent in the media these days might give us some examples.

A while back, this newspaper did an attention-getting series on underage drinking in our community that you must have seen. You might be very concerned about this topic, and what steps should and shouldn't be taken to address it. And you might also be interested to know that the General Assembly is taking up a bill on that important topic this year. Possibly you even saw a front page story on this in one of our daily papers just last weekend. The news story told you that local citizens were testifying at a hearing before the Judiciary Committee, and some details about the bill, but does the daily newspaper tell you what the bill is, how to get a copy of it, or who the folks are on the Judiciary Committee? Of course not!

In our last column, we mentioned Governor Rell's proposal to eliminate the municipal property tax on cars, which had a public hearing this Monday at the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee (the story in the daily newspaper noted that "only a few members of the public attended"). I have to admit, it is amusing to note that for years, legislators from our cities (care to guess which political party they are from?) have complained that this tax required considerable effort to collect, never attained a 100% collection rate, unfairly "hit" urban vs. suburban residents, etc. etc., but now they are struggling to come up with reasons to find fault with the governor's proposal! But more importantly, do **you** think this is a good idea? And how are you supposed to find out which of your area legislators is on this committee?

So here are some basics on what you can do; if I can figure it out, I assure you that a seven year old can get this information effortlessly. If you are at all computer-friendly, you can find the Legislature's website at www.cga.ct.gov. So if you want to know who is actually on that Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee (now you can send them a brief, hand-written note about how you appreciate their service to the taxpayers, and that you support eliminating that car tax!), go to "Bulletin" on the Connecticut General Assembly (CGA) website. This will keep you busy for a while, because not only can you review the Committees' rosters at the very end of the Bulletin, you can thoroughly peruse what Committee is doing what today (and tomorrow) and a host of other info items on the Session and the process.

Thoroughly impressed with your ability to seamlessly acquire all of this valuable information (and you did not even have to pay some lobbyist for the privilege of getting details that are all readily available) you decide to find out what happened on that underage drinking topic. The newspaper said the hearing on Friday, February 24 was being held by the Judiciary Committee, so at the website's home page you see 'committees' at the top, and you easily find Judiciary after that. Maybe if you look at "public hearings" and the agendas for those hearings, and you scan the 2.24 for agenda, could there be something on "underage drinking"? Yup, it's right there as House Bill 5211, so now you can look up what is proposed in HB 5211! Do you like it, hate it, think it needs changes? The information, and how the committee will vote in the future will all be right there.

Just think what could possibly happen if voters followed what actually went on in their government, and how elected officials actually vote (as opposed to the media spin of press releases). And maybe it is time for our annual column on how to best contact and influence your legislator. Stay tuned

Please feel free to contact me with your concerns and issues. As your state representative, it is my job, and my priority to represent you and to make sure that your needs and concerns are addressed at the capitol. You can write to me at Room 4200, Legislative Office Building, Hartford, CT 06106-1591, send me e-mail at John.Ryan@housegop.state.ct.us or call my office toll-free at 1-800-842-1423.